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JOSEPH WOLF. WITH SOME OF HIS STUDIES AND SKETCHES

BY AUBYN TREVOR-BATTYE

‘WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THE BEST ALL-ROUND ANIMAL PAINTER THAT EVER LIVED.’

Sir Edwin Landseer.



GREY PARTRIDGE
A VERY EARLY STUDY
IN WATER COLOUR
BY J. WOLF

boy who loved birds and flowers from the first could not have had a better natural school. The lands by his home dropped down in woods and hollows and tributary streams to the very banks of the Moselle. Otters, badgers, foxes, stoats, weasels, polecats and stone-martens abounded there then, and in winter the wolves came ; an occasional wolf had indeed been known to breed close to this village, not fifteen miles from Coblenz. Besides these animals, wild red deer, fallow deer and roe haunted the forests.

This boy then went about with his eyes open and his heart developing a fellowship with all wild

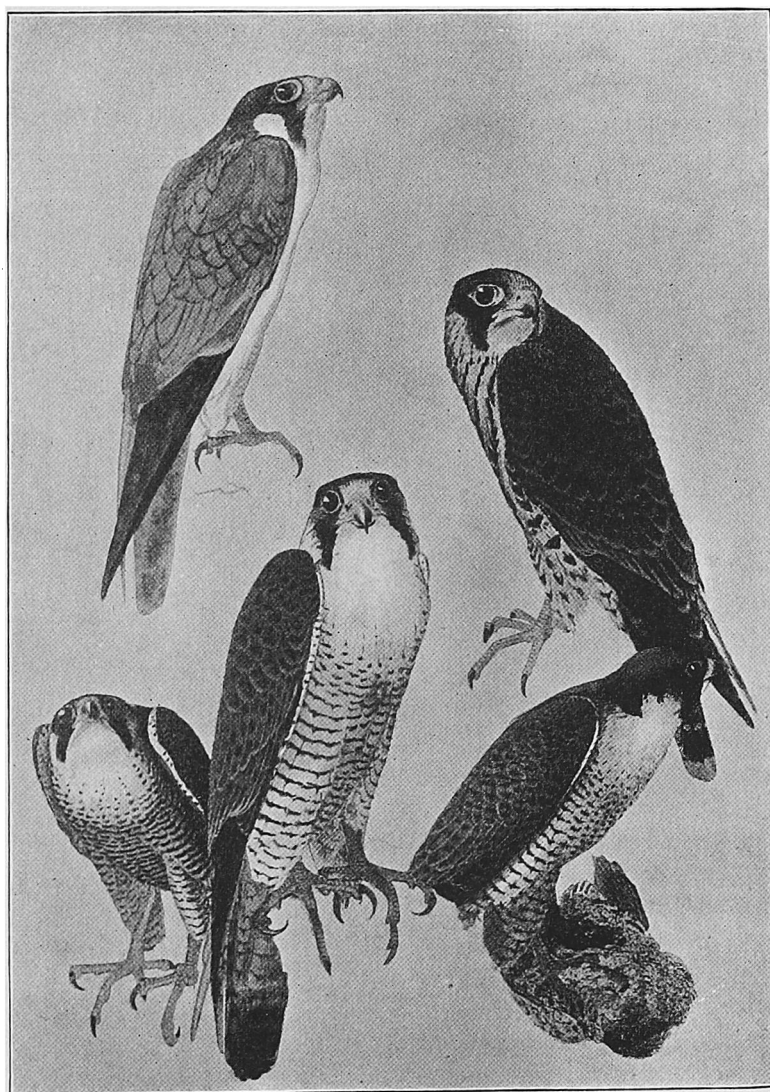
PRIVILEGED to write a short sketch of this distinguished artist, there lies before me a very pleasurable task, as it needs must be to a naturalist whose own wanderings in many lands have largely been determined by the various problems of animal life, and doubly so to one who may add to this without presumption some claim to years of study of animal form. It is to an accurate knowledge of animal habit and animal form that Mr. Wolf owes the distinction he has held for so many years of standing at the head of his branch of the painter's profession ; and without it not all the cunning of his hand, great as it is, would have won him, and long ago, his place as the naturalists' ideal artist.

Joseph Wolf was born on 21st January, 1820, the eldest son of Anton Wolf, Headman of Möerz on the Trèves and Coblenz road. The



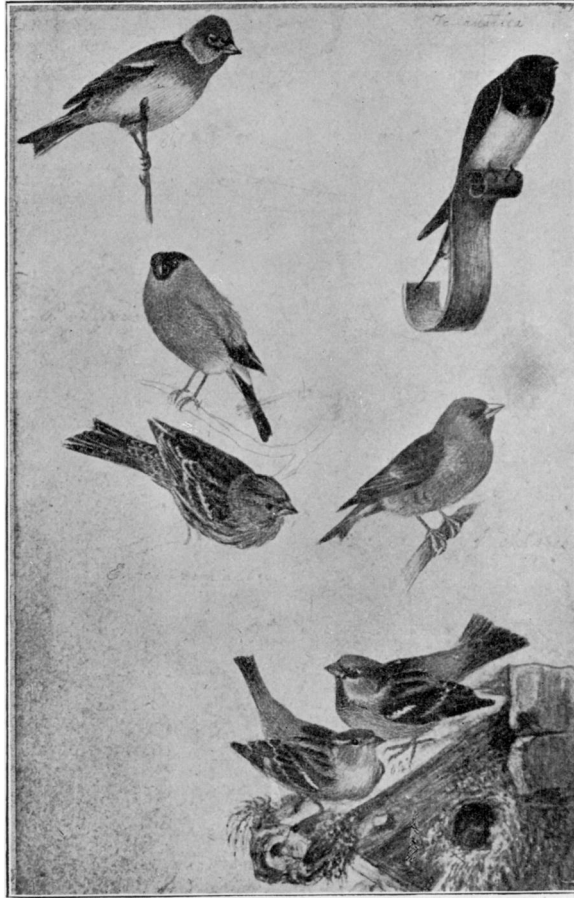
STUDY OF EUROPEAN WOLF
DONE IN PENCIL
BY JOSEPH WOLF

DRAWINGS OF BIRDS



*STUDIES OF PEREGRINE FALCONS
A VERY EARLY WATER COLOUR
BY JOSEPH WOLF*

BY A BOY



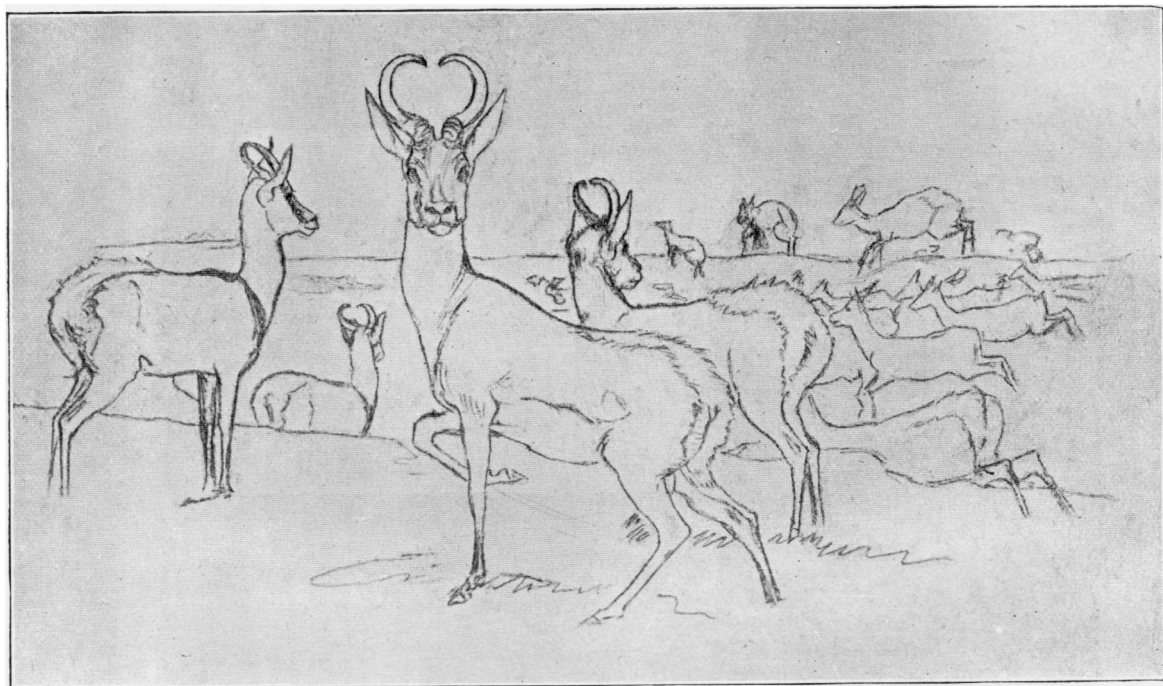
*VERY EARLY STUDIES DONE
IN WATER COLOUR BY
JOSEPH WOLF*

MOUNTAIN FINCH
BULLFINCH
YELLOW HAMMER
CHIMNEY SWALLOW
GREEN FINCH
HOUSE SPARROWS

JOSEPH WOLF. ANIMAL PAINTER

things. Except for a chance forester or so he had no one in sympathy with him. He was always drawing in pencil birds and animals. Some of them gave him considerable trouble for they were never still ; but the owl he found a very good sitter. He took to keeping his models about him so that they should be always at hand. When the storks came up to breed on the chimney he caught one and cut its wing ; and the buzzards, goshawks and other birds of prey which passed the village on their spring and autumn migra-

buildings, and so if a stone-marten had been running round (for the stone-marten, an animal something like a gigantic polecat, is a sad visitor of chicken-roosts) you could soon intercept him with a trap. Now if there was one trapper more skilled than another in the village of Möerz it was Joseph Wolf. A winter marten's coat would provide him with the necessary hair for a paint brush, so he laid his traps and was soon rewarded with a fine stone-marten. Out of this animal's coat he made the brushes with



*STUDIES OF SPRINGBOK ANTELOPES
DONE IN PENCIL BY JOSEPH WOLF*

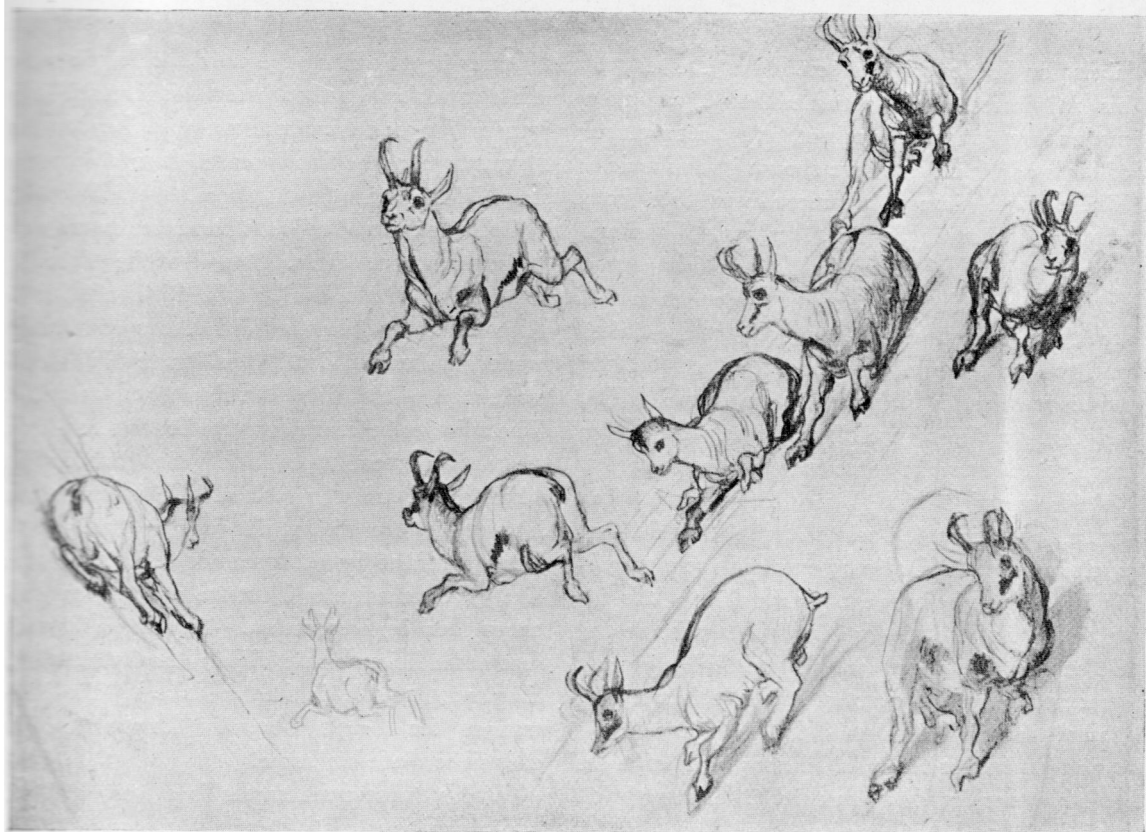
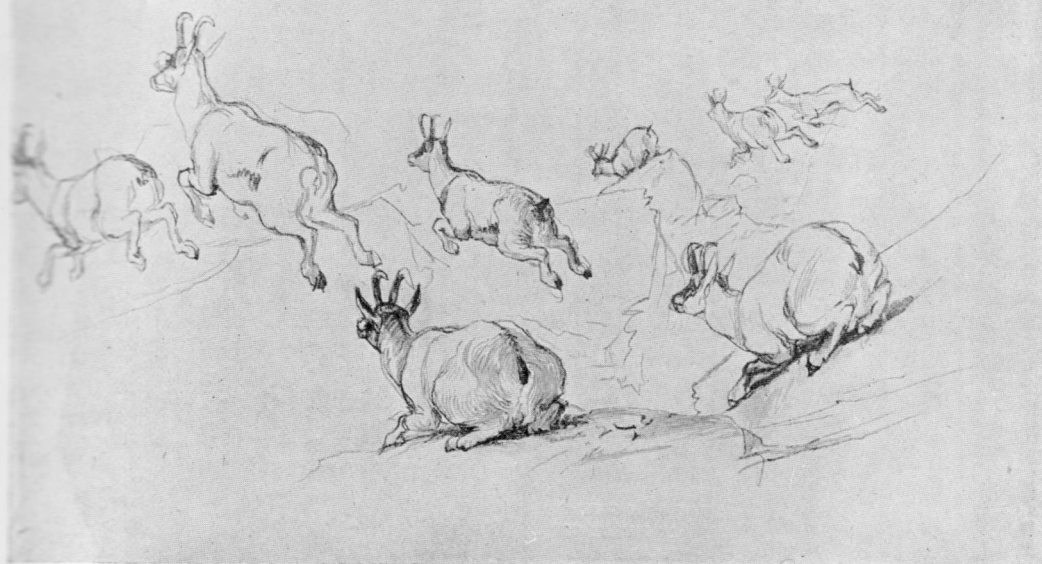
tions had also to pay toll to this young self-taught student. Half the night, or from earliest dawn he would lie out in the woods learning the cries and calls of the creatures and following their ways. At last he became a painter, and that was a very proud day. It fell on this wise.

Among the wares hawked through the villages by an old pedlar woman was a box of little hard paints. He bought it for a penny and then set about getting a brush. He obtained one in the following manner.

When the snow fell you could track all the animals that moved at night round about the

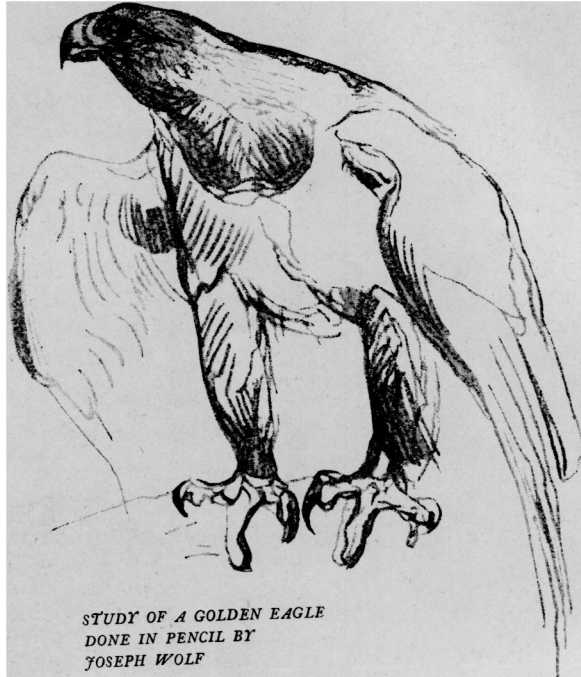
which he painted the birds he trapped, or shot with an old flint-lock gun.

Until he was sixteen years old, Wolf had been kept to the humble pursuits of the farm ; filling up the intervals between ploughing and tending sheep with wanderings with his gun, and with trapping and making note-book studies of birds and beasts. He now persuaded a reluctant father to apprentice him to a lithographer, and was sent to Gebrüder Becker, of Coblenz. Here he remained for three years condemned to work of an unpretentious character, such as making tradesmen's bill-heads,



*TWO COMPOSITIONS OF STUDIES
OF CHAMOIS, DONE IN PENCIL
BY JOSEPH WOLF*

JOSEPH WOLF



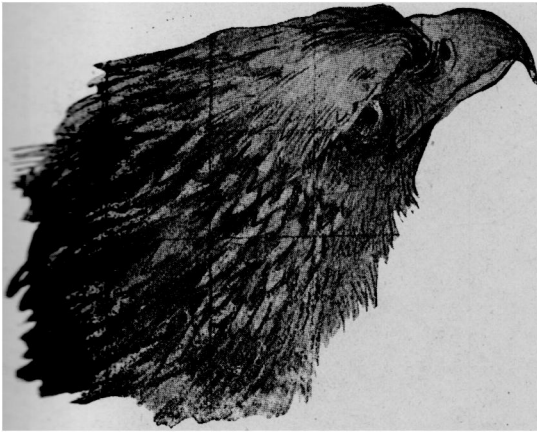
labels for bottles, and so on. At the end of his apprenticeship he returned home, and then made those wonderfully minute and exact pictures of birds of which some are shown in this article. These small pictures are reproduced here from photographs taken by Mr. Archibald Thorburn from the drawings done by Mr. Wolf as a boy. It was inevitable that some of the paints should lose their strength as time went on, and the whites and yellows have certainly changed a little, but what remains is sufficiently wonderful. The original drawings were of the actual size shown here. And there are some even smaller in Joseph Wolf's sketch-book. There is a willow wren there, and a golden-crested wren, but half-an-inch in length. Ordinary eyes require a magnifying glass to help in examining these; but the keen sight of the young hunter-naturalist needed no such aid; yet they are so astonishingly exact that not only in character, but in colour and in actual drawing of detail are they even now among the most beautiful and truthful examples of birds ever drawn by any artist. Young Wolf had little pocket-money in those days, and by drawing them in miniature, he saved his paper, and saved his paints. But they were youthful *tours de force*; he was to do broader and more useful work than these.

After a year among the farm surroundings he left to travel by himself and seek his fortune. His wanderings took him to Frankfort, Leyden and Darmstadt, and he finally settled down to a year's study in the School at Antwerp.

In Frankfort Wolf was fortunate in making the acquaintance of Dr. Rüppell, of the Museum, the author of a work on the Birds of North-East Africa. Charmed with the specimens of work he showed, Dr. Rüppell gave him an introduction to his friend Dr. Kaup, in Darmstadt. The talisman he carried was the little sketch-book containing those marvels of bird-drawings of which I have already spoken. This it was that insured his recognition, not only by Rüppell and Kaup, but also by the great Schlegel, who gave him a commission to illustrate a work on Falconry then in preparation. It was under their recommendations that Wolf finally came to England, (1848), invited to take up the illustrations for *Gray's Genera*. England he has ever since made his home.

Wolf's subsequent career is a story of hard, conscientious work, of gradual recognition and assured success. The little sketches which had won him attention in his own country proved equally valuable credentials in this. Every one who looked at them recognised at once the

A GREAT BIRD PAINTER

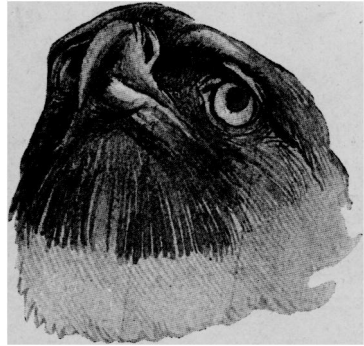


PENCIL STUDY OF A
GOLDEN EAGLE'S HEAD
BY JOSEPH WOLF

genius of a man who stood alone in his branch of art. The character of his work brought him into touch with the most distinguished men of his day. Naturalists and philosophers, such as Owen, Darwin, and Wallace; Bates of the Amazon; Gould, the ornithologist; Galton, the author of *Tropical Africa*; David Livingstone; Oswell, the great hunter, and his friend and pupil, Samuel Baker; Landseer, the animal painter; Lord Derby, the maker of the famous Knowsley Zoological Collection—these are a few of the names of those whose encouragement or friendship he secured. In 1849 he sent his first picture to the Academy, and through Sir Edwin Landseer it was hung on the line. It was called *Woodcocks seeking Shelter*. So popular was it that for some after this there was a perfect 'boom' in woodcocks from his hand. He always drew them sitting, because he had

never happened to see one in any other attitude, and it was characteristic of him that he would not work from imagination when the question at issue was one of natural fact.

To give the names of all the works he has illustrated would be to write too long a list for this place; he practically did all the natural history work of his day—there was no one else who could do it with his singular mastery. Of course he worked through many years at the figures for the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society*, but it is not by these scientific studies that his power as an artist is to be judged. Far from it; it is by those many marvellous contri-



PENCIL STUDY OF A
GOLDEN EAGLE'S HEAD
BY JOSEPH WOLF

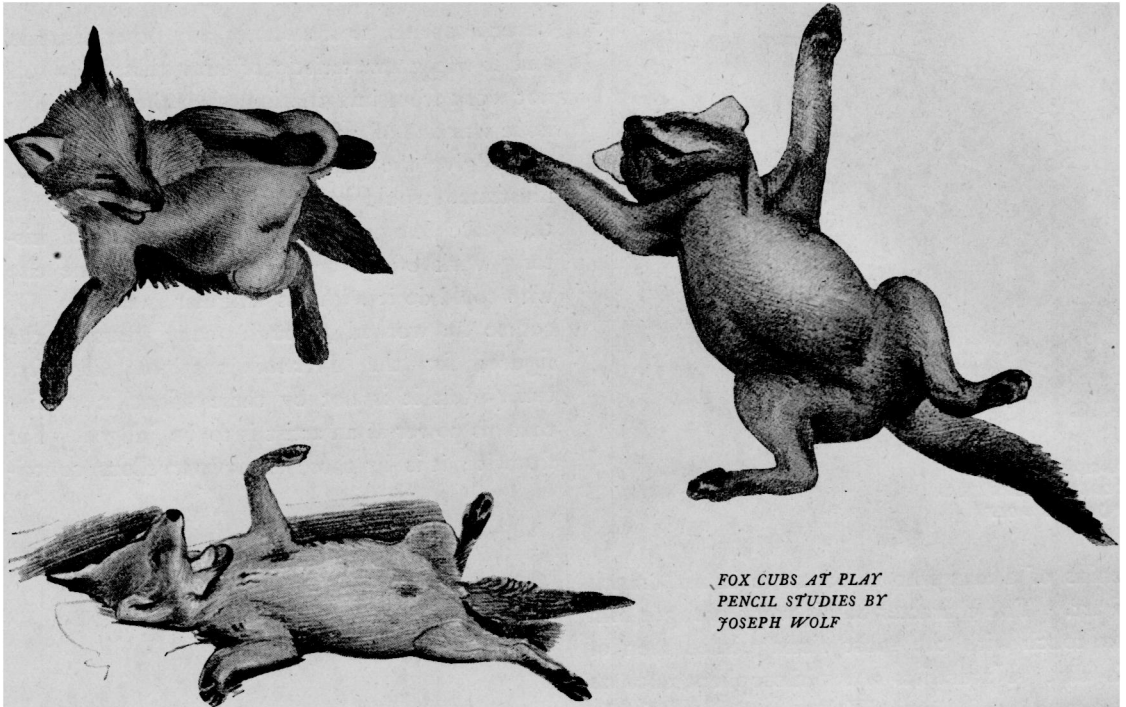
butions to the painting of natural scenery and wild life which are now in the hands of a few.

That love of and power over wild creatures which characterised him as a boy he has never lost. His studio was always filled with song, and its feathered tenants lost all fear of man. Even the great Darwin himself inspired no fear in these familiar companions; for one day as he sat in Wolf's studio, one of the tame bullfinches made a dead set at his white beard and tugged and pulled until the old man laughed again. It was to this intimate knowledge—putting on one side his great powers as an artist—that his great success was due. He always gave his animals their own proper characteristics and not those of something else. He never fell into Landseer's failing of giving human expressions to animals' faces. On the contrary his animals were wild instinctive creatures shown to us as they had never been shown before. No wonder Landseer, speaking of him to Mr. Dresser, said that he considered Wolf to be, 'without exception, the



PENCIL STUDY OF A
GOLDEN EAGLE'S HEAD
BY JOSEPH WOLF

JOSEPH WOLF



FOX CUBS AT PLAY
PENCIL STUDIES BY
JOSEPH WOLF

best all-round animal painter that ever lived. When a good many artists of the present day are forgotten,' Landseer added, 'Wolf will be remembered.'

Never was there a more careful or conscientious student than Joseph Wolf. Deer, fox, grouse, every new specimen obtained, be the creature what it might, was accurately measured and studied in detail, and was made the subject of endless studies until every point had been committed to memory. The result of this told strongly on his work.

The practice with painters of lesser power is to lay the dead bird on the table, with wings outspread, and so to form from it a bird in flight. This was not Wolf's way; he carried it all in his head. A few days on a mountain watching eagles, and returning home he could put a study on paper, every turn of the bird in its soaring shown there with consummate truthfulness and skill. Here is a little story communicated by Mr. Dresser to Mr. Palmer, for his *Life of Joseph Wolf*, a delightfully-written book and one upon which I have drawn in I fear rather a barefaced way for the purpose of this article. 'Professor Schlegel told me, many years ago, when I was spending a few days with him at Leyden, that his first acquaintance with Wolf was when he invited the latter to Holland.

Wolf came as a fresh, young-looking lad to see him, and told Schlegel that he would like to see some waders and marsh birds; so Schlegel took him out in a punt covered with bushes, in which he was wont to watch the birds. On arriving among them, he asked Wolf where his note-book and pencil were, but the answer was that he did not require them. After spending some time watching the birds, they returned to Leyden, and Schlegel asked Wolf to supper, for which purpose they adjourned to a restaurant; and after supper Wolf asked for paper and pencil and made some excellent sketches of birds he had seen that day for the first time. Schlegel told me that he was astounded at the accuracy of the attitude, as given by Wolf; and at once realised that he excelled any other natural history painter he had hitherto known.'



FOX'S HEAD
A STUDY IN PENCIL BY
JOSEPH WOLF

A GREAT ANIMAL PAINTER



PENCIL STUDY OF A JACKAL
FOR THE ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY'S PROCEEDINGS
BY JOSEPH WOLF

Even at the Zoo, where so much of his time has been spent, Mr. Wolf tells me he never attempted to draw direct *from the creature before him*; only he would watch it as it moved about, collecting impressions of movement, and then turn away and proceed with his drawings, returning again to his observation at a subsequent stage. From this one can get some idea of how he has been able to convey so astonishingly such an infinite variety of form of attitude and movement in a single picture. We must remember that there was no kodak then. Instantaneous photography, which has come so usefully to the aid of animal painters, was still unborn, and eye, hand and intelligence had to rely upon themselves.

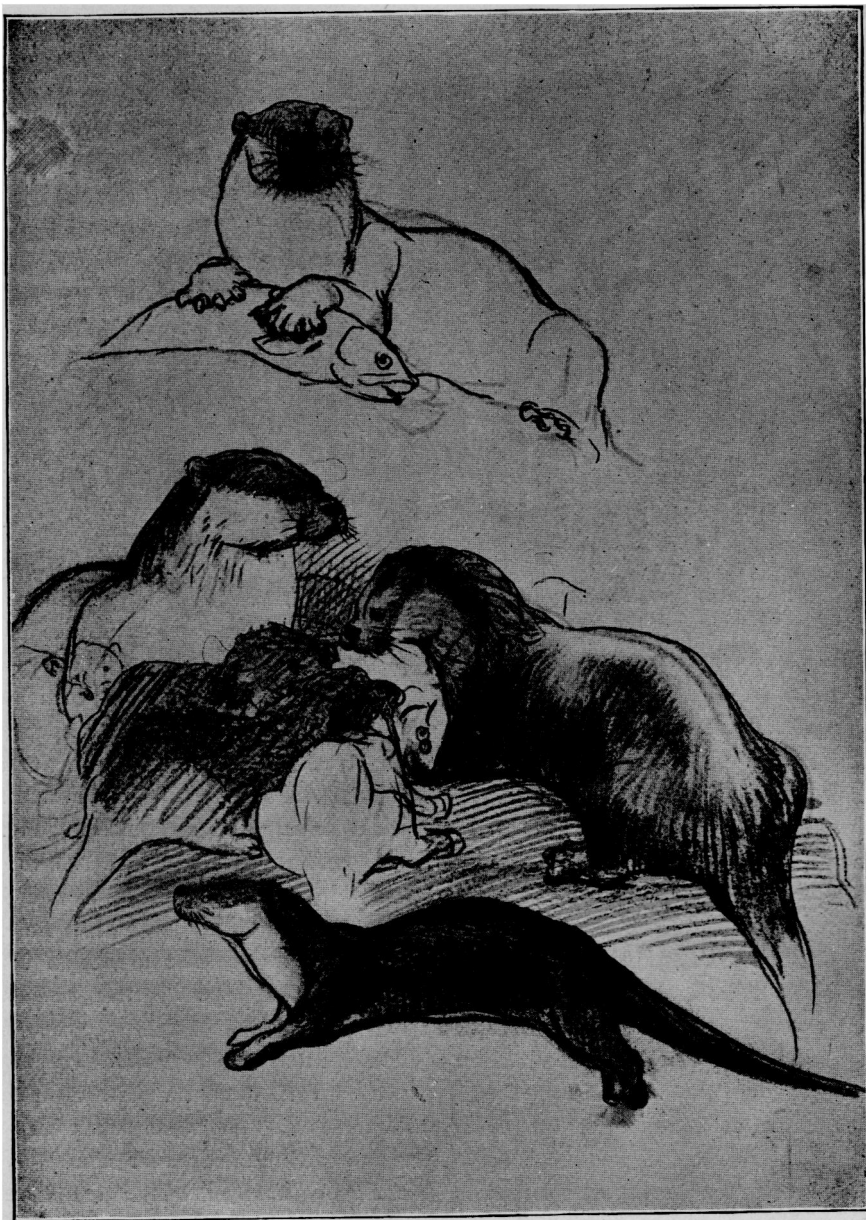
To see to what marvellous precision these could be trained, one need but look at these sketches shown here. Take the two little pictures of chamois. Observe the sureness of hand in the line work; the verve and vigour of the treatment; the variety and range of movement; the tension and release of muscular action and the sense of wild descent and scramble. And yet all are under the absolute control of instinct, of confident familiarity with those precipitous declivities, and of perfect adaptation to conditions as they are.

Wolf's has never been 'studio work,' as that phrase is understood. He brought with him from his boyhood by the Moselle a greater fund of real knowledge upon which to draw than most

men obtain through a long country life. And in England he had opportunities of adding to this. He went to stay at Knowsley, where Lord Derby had formed that magnificent collection of wild animals, which in some respects has never been surpassed. He went into Sutherlandshire to study wild scenery, ptarmigan and snow. He went to Inverness-shire and watched the golden eagles beating the mountain side for game, and studied the habits of the ospreys at their eyrie. He paid many other visits, but none of which you cannot trace some recollection in his work, for all were fruitful of new subjects or new points of view.

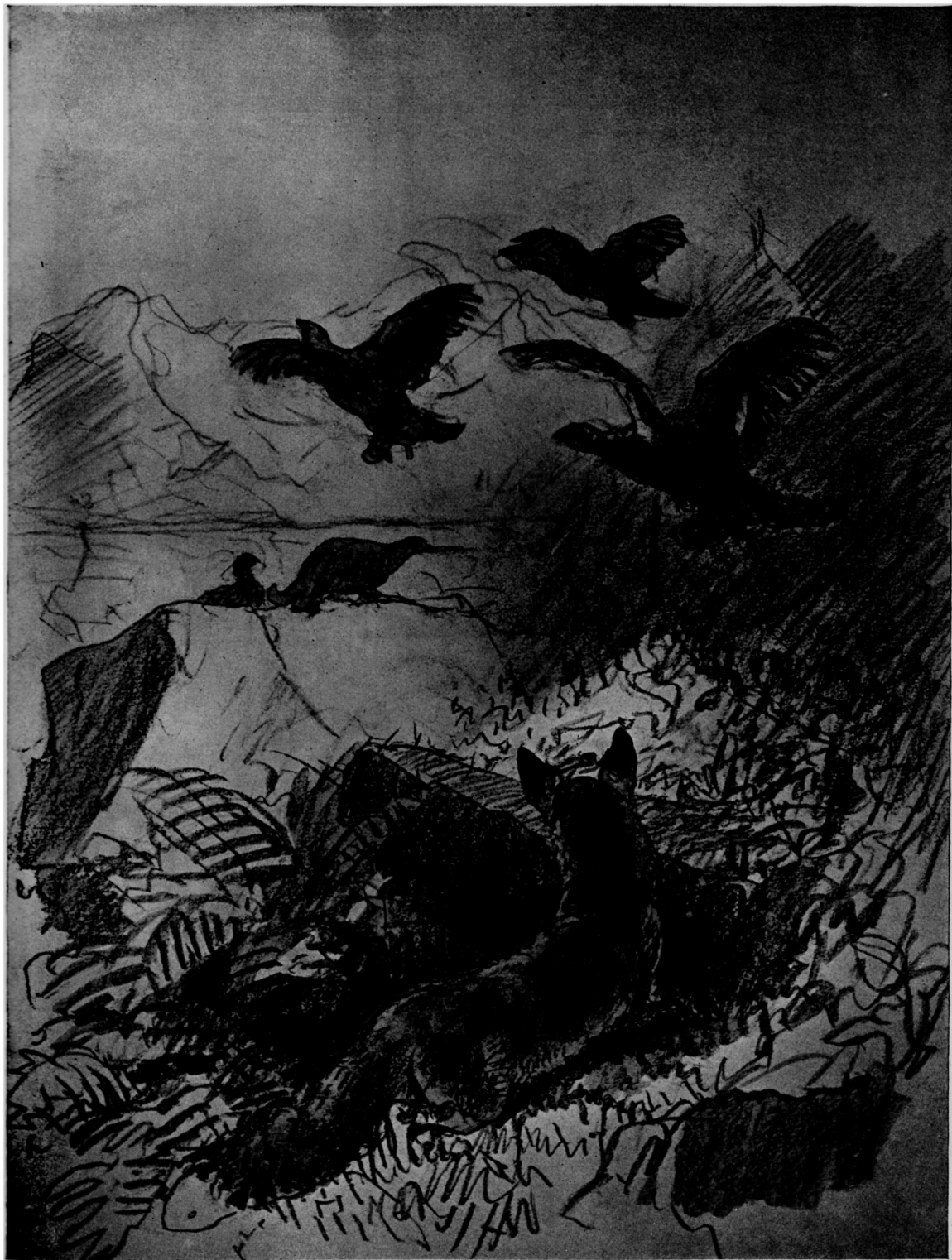
I remember seeing some years ago in an exhibition in London, a picture—a water colour drawing—by Wolf, which made a profound impression on me. It represented a merlin in pursuit of linnets. I can see it now. The merlin was skimming, or gliding along close to the ground, silent, inevitable upon its quarry. Everything—the bird's shadow that followed close, the limpid sunshine, every detail somehow contributed to the impression of silence, intensity and speed. This at least is as I recollect the drawing, and, if I knew where it were, I would go far to see it again.

It will be interesting now to try and show in what light Wolf's work was regarded by his contemporaries, or rather by those of his con-



*STUDIES OF OTTERS
DONE IN CHARCOAL BY
JOSEPH WOLF*

*AN OTTER WITH CAPTURED FISH—
OLD AND YOUNG OTTERS—
AN OTTER GALLOPING*

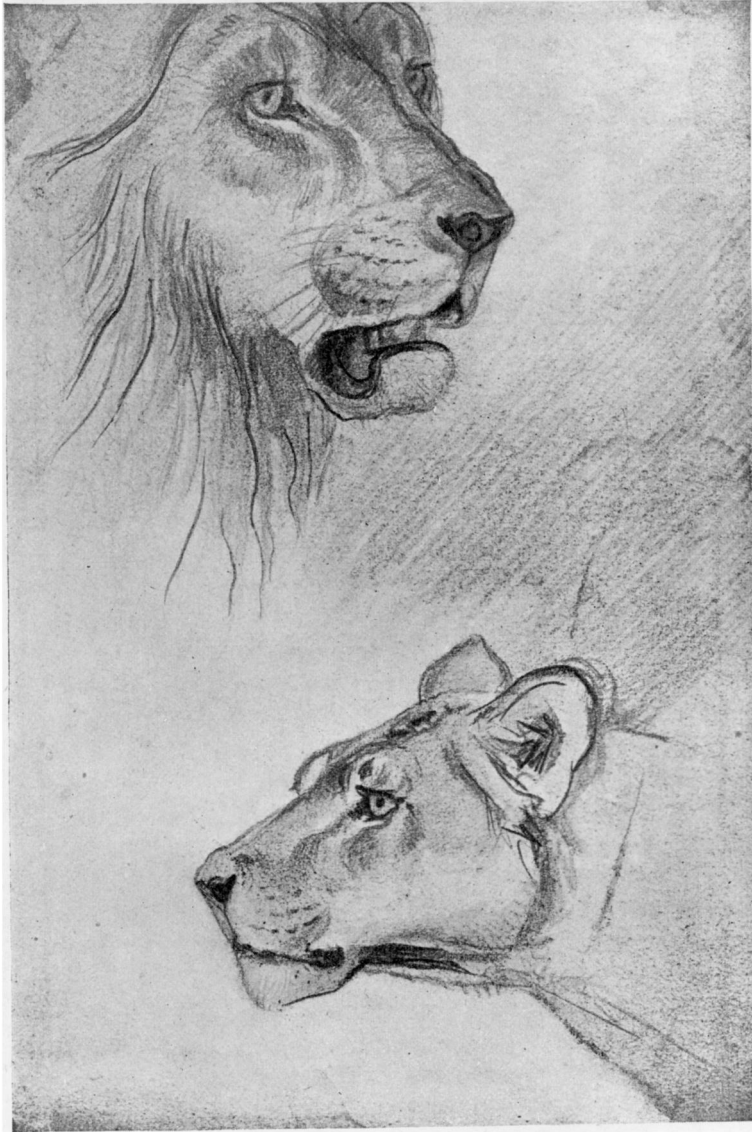


A FOX SURPRISING BLACK GAME
A CHARCOAL SKETCH
BY JOSEPH WOLF

OPINION OF DARWIN AND OTHERS

temporaries whose special knowledge makes their opinion not only best worth having, but probably most valued by himself. This point has been very well brought out by Mr. Palmer in his book. Testimony to his powers comes curiously enough from three very distinct sides of acknowledg-

branch of work. Darwin, Sir Richard Owen, Professor Newton, Dr. Sclater and many others add their tribute to this opinion. It might well be supposed that work of this kind, involving such detail and technical accuracy, would inevitably lead to loss of freedom—to a cramped style.



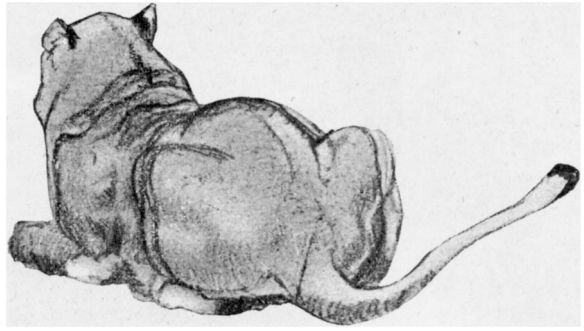
PENCIL STUDIES OF HEADS OF LION AND LIONESS
BY JOSEPH WOLF

ment; namely from men of science, from sportsmen and from painters.

By that long series of works, drawn not only for the *Zoological Society's Proceedings*, but for the private purposes of scientific men, he established a place beyond all challenge as *unrivalled* in this

Far from it. Wolf was never more completely at home than in his sporting pictures. He could not bring equal enthusiasm to the work for all the travellers and big-game hunters who came to see them, but that was not his fault. Livingstone, for instance, had not only not the faintest idea of

**PENCIL STUDY
OF A LIONESS
BY JOSEPH WOLF**

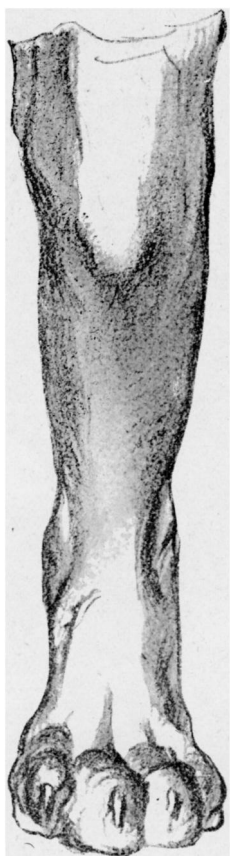


**PENCIL STUDY
OF LION CUBS
BY JOSEPH WOLF**



**PENCIL DRAWING OF DEAD TIGERS
(AFTER A PHOTOGRAPH)
BY JOSEPH WOLF**

JOSEPH WOLF



STUDY OF LION'S LEG
(CHARCOAL)
BY JOSEPH WOLF

what drawing meant, but had absolutely no powers of description ; nor did Gordon Cumming, the slaughterer, commend himself to Wolf. But now and then he found a man after his own heart. Chief among these stood William Cotton Oswell, 'the greatest hunter ever known in modern times.' Oswell, with his boundless enthusiasm, his fine and kindly nature, his generosity of view, his close observation, and his great powers of description, was a man after Wolf's own heart. And as he sat in Wolf's studio, giving in his vivid, picturesque way all the details and local colour of some telling incident of his African hunting life, the artist would strike off in a few strong lines of charcoal grey such figures of wild animals and impressions of stirring incidents as had never been done nor have been since. A melancholy interest for the present writer attaches to the admiration in which Wolf held the great hunter. They had not met for many years ; a year or two ago they

had both promised to come and renew old acquaintance in the writer's home. It was much for Mr. Wolf to undertake, for his old enemy, the rheumatism, bothered him a good deal ; but the appeal was one he could not resist, and indeed it would have been worth much to have seen these two men together. Alas ! it was not to be. The meeting was prevented by Oswell's sad and unexpected death.

I have given elsewhere Sir Edwin Landseer's opinion of Wolf's work. But Landseer was an animal painter, and there were other artists not in his line who recognised in the work of Joseph Wolf the ring of genius. I refer to the Pre-Raphaelites, and I daresay Mr. Palmer will let me quote the passages he gives. The first is from a letter by Woolner. He says, 'I cannot speak in words of Wolf as highly as he deserves, and I am rejoiced that you seem resolved to do his splendid abilities justice. I remember fighting his battles as far back as 1848, when many persons were inclined to disallow his high origi-



STUDY OF LION'S LEG.
(CHARCOAL)
BY JOSEPH WOLF

A GREAT ANIMAL PAINTER

and vivid truthfulness, and I doubt, even now, if there are a great number who appreciate his works as they ought to be admired.' The next is from a letter by Mr. W. M. Rossetti. 'It is quite true that my brother admired Wolf's pictures and drawings heartily. Wolf began exhibiting in London soon after the Pre-Raphaelite movement began in English art, and all the Pre-Raphaelites, including my brother, were delighted with his acute and minute observation, and delicate precision of rendering.'

One word, in conclusion, about the portrait

Of Mr. Wolf's personal characteristics it seems presumptuous for me to speak. His gentleness of character, his manly independence, his fine old-world courtliness of bearing yet homely courtesy of address, his love of children, his loyalty to friends, his voice of encouragement for the young and the hard-working—these are familiar to all who know him and need no words from any writer. That magnificent physique of his has served him well. It has had its enemies of course, but it has fought and weathered them not unsuccessfully. And now,



THE DYING LION, A PENCIL SKETCH
BY JOSEPH WOLF

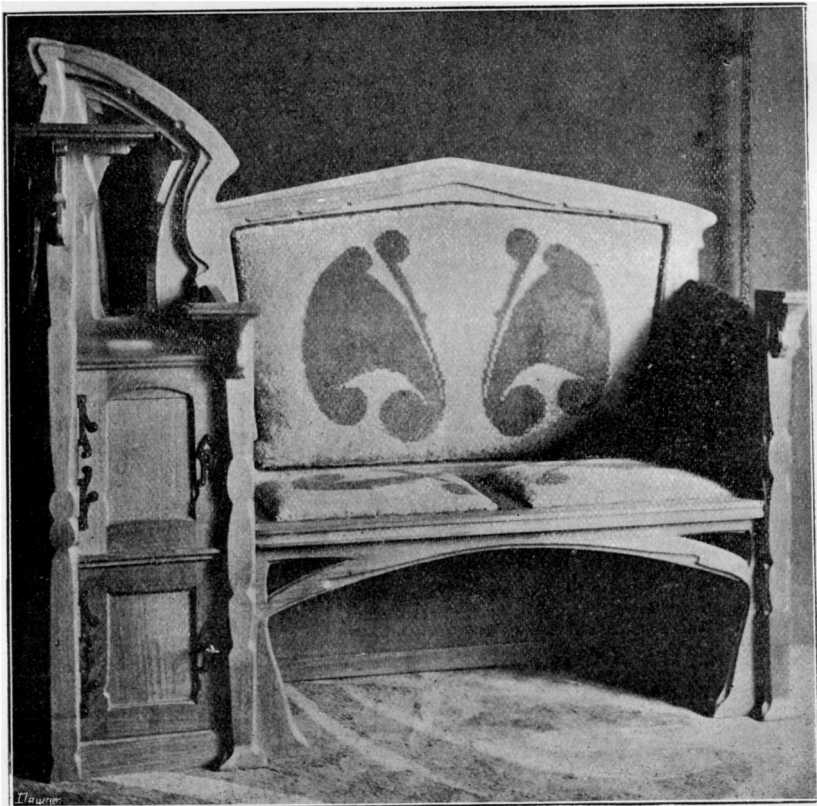
which accompanies this article, through the kindness of its painter, Mr. Lance Calkin. When it was finished the artist was not quite satisfied with the right hand, which held a cigar. Perhaps he thought it looked a little aimless. At any rate Wolf suggested, by a happy inspiration, that he should put a hawk upon that hand. No one knew better than Wolf that a falcon is carried on the left hand, but in this case only the right was available. So on to the right fist Wolf himself set the Hobby Falcon, painted as he alone could paint it.

as he sits in that studio, stored with piles on piles of exhaustive studies done in many places and for many works (before him on the easel a magnificent golden eagle who has just missed an Alpine hare), it is indeed difficult to believe that this hale, humorous and kindly host was born so long ago.

It only remains for me again to express my sincerest thanks to Mr. Wolf for his kindness in allowing me to draw so largely upon his sketch-books.



*A BEATEN COPPER CASKET
WITH STEEL MOUNTINGS
DESIGNED AND MADE BY
EDGAR SIMPSON*



*A SETTEE WITH CUPBOARD
COVERED IN RAISED WOOL, THE
FRAME OF POLISHED OAK*

(From the Hall of the house of Madame B., in Brussels)